On Falling In Love With A Quality And Thereafter Not Approving Any Other Different

KNOW now-may God exalt you! -that Love exercises an effective authority, a decisive sovereignty over the soul; its commands cannot be opposed, its ordinances may not be flouted, its rule is not to be transgressed; it demands unwavering obedience, and against its dominion there is no appeal. Love untwists the firmest plaits, and looses the tightest strands it dissolves that which is most solid, undoes that which is most firm; it penetrates the deepest recesses of the heart, and makes lawful things most strictly forbidden.

I have known many men whose discrimination was beyond suspicion, men not to be feared deficient in knowledge, or wanting in taste, or lacking discernment, and who nevertheless described their loved ones as possessing certain qualities not by any means admired by the general run of mankind, or approved according to the accepted canons of beauty. Yet those qualities had become an obsession with them, the sole object of their passion, and the very last word (as they thought) in elegance. Thereafter their loved ones vanished, either into oblivion, or by separation, or jilting, or through some other accident to which love is always liable; but those men never lost their admiration for the curious qualities which provoked their approval of them, neither did they ever afterwards cease to prefer these above other attributes that are in.-reality superior to them. They had no inclination whatsoever for any qualities besides these; indeed, the very features which the rest of mankind deem most excellent were shunned and despised by them. So they continued until the day of their death; all their lives were spent in sighing regretfully for the loved ones they had lost, and taking joyous delight in their remembered companionship. I do not consider, that this was any kind of affectation on their part; on the contrary, it was their true and natural disposition to admire such eccentric qualities; they chose them unreservedly, they thought none other worthy of regard, and in the very depths of their souls they did not believe otherwise.

I know a man whose loved one was somewhat short of neck; thereafter he never admired anyone, man or girl, whose neck was long and slender. I also know a man whose first attachment was with a girl inclined to be petite; he never fell in love with a tall woman after that. A third man I know was madly enamoured of a girl whose mouth was a trifle wide; lie thought small mouths positively disgusting, he abused them roundly, and clearly felt an authentic aversion in regard to them. Now the men of whom I have been speaking are by no means under-endowed knowledge and culture; on the contrary they are men of the keenest perception, truly worthy to be described as intelligent and understanding.

Let me add a personal touch. In my youth I loved a slave-girl who happened to be a blonde; from that time I have never admired brunettes, not though their lark tresses set off a face as resplendent as the sun, or the very image of beauty itself. I find this taste to have become a part of my whole make-up and constitution since those early days; my soul will not suffer me to acquire any other, or to love any type but that. This very same thing happened to my father also God be pleased with him!), and he remained faithful his first preference until the term of his earthly life was done.

All the Caliphs of the Banu Marwan (God have mercy on their souls!), and especially the sons of al-Nasir, were without variation or exception disposed by nature to prefer blondes. I

have myself seen them, and known others who had seen their forebears, from the days of al-Nasir's reign down to the present day; every one of them has been fair-haired, taking after, their mothers, so that this has become a hereditary trait with them; all but Sulaiman al-Zafir (God have mercy on him!), whom I remember to have had black ringlets and a black beard. As for al-Nasir and al-Hakam al-Mustansir (may God be pleased with them!), I have been informed by my late father, the vizier, as well as by others, that both of them were blond and blue-eyed. The same is true of Hisham al-Mu'aiyad, Muhammad al-Mahdi, and `Abd al-Rahman al-Murtada (may God be merciful to them all!); I saw them myself many times, and had the honour of being received by them, and I remarked that they all had fair hair and blue eyes. Their sons, their brothers, and all their near kinsmen possessed the selfsame characteristics. I know not whether this was due to a predilection innate in them all, or whether it was in consequence of a family tradition handed down from their ancestors, and which they followed in their turn. This comes out clearly in the poetry of `Abd al-Malik Ibn Marwan Ibn `Abd al-Rahman Ibn Marwan, the descendant of the Caliph al-Nasir, better known as al-Taliq; he was the greatest poet of Andalusia in those times, and in most of his love lyrics he serenades blondes. I have seen him personally, and sat in his company.

It is not so remarkable that a man who has once fallen in love with an ill-favored wench should not carry that foible with him for the rest of his amatory career; it is one of those things that are always liable to happen. Neither is it astonishing that a man should prefer the inferior article, when such an eccentricity is part of his inborn nature. What is truly amazing, is that a man formerly accustomed to see things with the eye of truth should suddenly be overcome by a casual passion, after he has been out about in society a long time, and that this accident of caprice should so completely transform him from his previous habits as to become a second nature with him, entirely displacing his first. In such extraordinary cases he will know well enough the superiority of his former disposition, but when he comes back to his senses he finds that his soul now refuses to have anything to do with any but the baser sort of goods. Marvelous indeed is the mighty domination, the splendid tyranny of the human passion. Such a man is a sincere and devoted lover, and not he who apes the manners of folk with whom he has no connexion whatever, and pretends to a character which belongs to him not at all. The latter sort of man asserts indeed that he chooses at will whom he will love; but if love had really taken possession of his powers of discernment, if love had extirpated his native reason and swept away his natural discretion, then love would have so dominated his soul that he would no longer be free to pick and choose, as he so boasts to do.

I have a poem or two on this theme also.

I know a youth that loved a lass
Whose neck was short and somewhat stout;
And now, when long-necked maidens pass,
He thinks them jinn's, without a doubt.

He is content, to justify
His claim that he has chosen well,
Upon a logic to rely

That has some substance, truth to tell.

Thus he would argue: " The wild cow
Is famed in proverb and in song,
And no man lives, but will allow
Beauty doth to the cow belong.

"Now never was the wild cow born
Whose neck was long and angular;
And are not camels held inn scorn
Because their necks stick out so far?"

I know another lad who loved
A most uncommon wide-mouthed dame
He said, " Her loveliness is proved
By the gazelle, whose mouth's the same."

And still a third young chap I know
Whose well-beloved was unco small;
" Tall women ", he would say, " are so
Stuck up-they're devils, one and all."

Another poem of mine is worth quoting here.

They blame the girl of whom I'm fond
Because her lovely hair is blond:
"But that's exactly", I reply,
"What makes her pretty, to my eye!"

They criticize the colour bright
Of glittering gold, and shimmering light,
And they are crazy so to do,
And stupid, and erroneous, too.

Is there just a cause to crab, think you,
The tender-sweet narcissus' hue,
Or is the twinkle of a star
So hateful to behold afar?

Of all God's creatures, I declare
That man of wisdom has least share
Who chooses, in his darkened soul,
To love a body black as coal.

Black is the hue, the Scriptures tell,
Of the inhabitants of Hell;
Black is the robe the mourner dons,
And mothers who have lost their sons.

Moreover, since from Khorasan
The black Abbasid banners ran,
The souls of men know, to their cost,
The cause of righteousness is lost.